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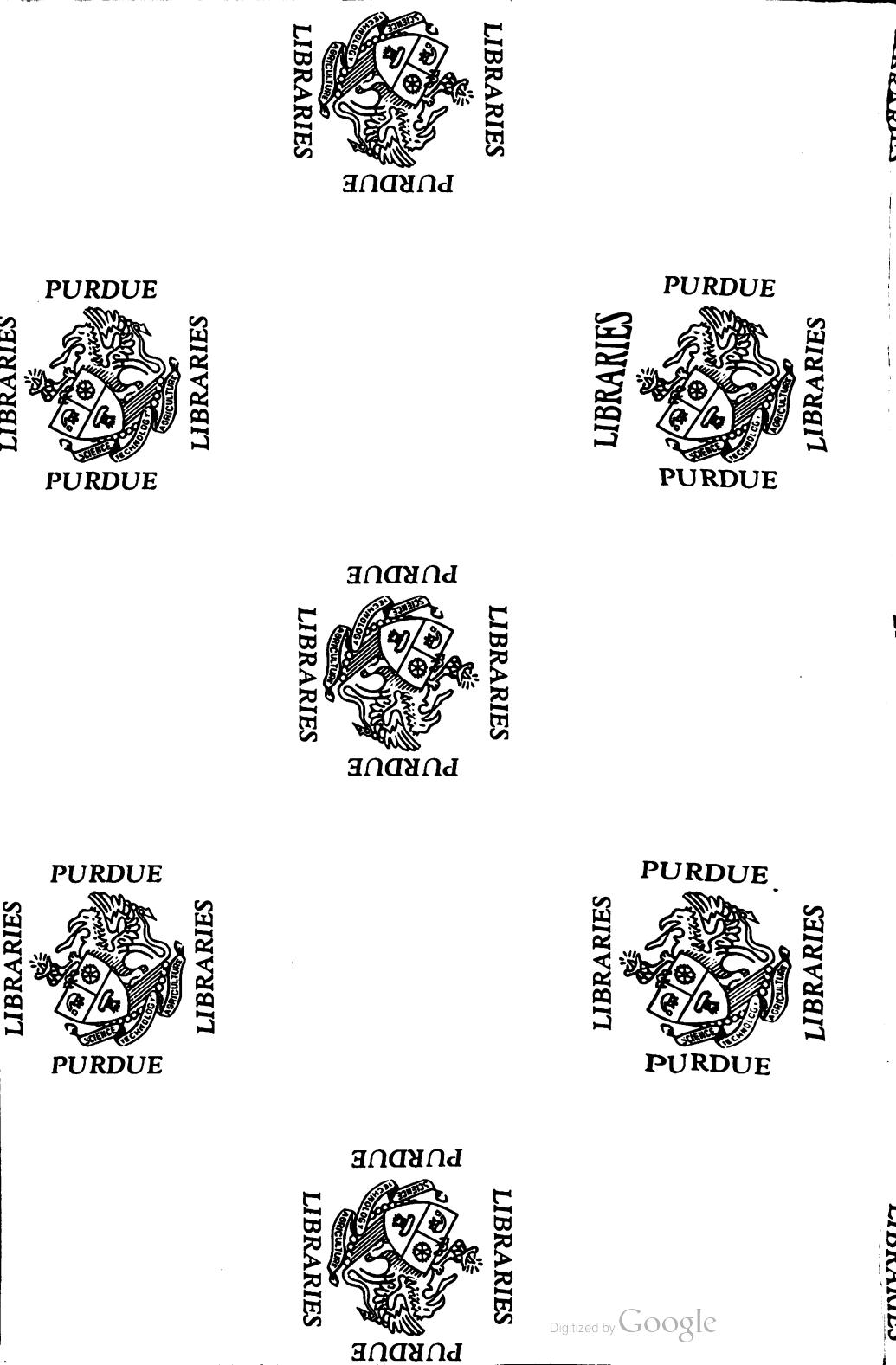
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SIR WILLIAM CRAIGIE**

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS DELIVERED AT CHICAGO
ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 1934**

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MAJOR TASKS IN ENGLISH STUDIES

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS FOR 1934

BY PROFESSOR SIR WILLIAM CRAIGIE

THE principle of "small profits, quick returns" is one which has its application to scholarship as well as to business. The scholar who successively undertakes the investigation of subjects with a limited scope, finishes his study of each within a few days or weeks, and publishes the result in one of the learned journals (as soon as the harassed editor can find room for it), is likely to make for himself a reputation more rapidly than his colleague who commits himself to an undertaking which he cannot possibly bring to a conclusion within several years. The latter may obtain as great a success in the end, or even a greater, by producing a standard work which will always be cited whenever the subject is mentioned or discussed. He has also the satisfaction of knowing that his work, if worth anything at all, will materially lighten the labours of every later worker in the same field. The diligent writer of short articles ought in fact to have an uneasy conscience in this respect, for everyone knows the increasing burden which is being laid upon the scholar and student by the steady growth in the number of learned journals, providing accommodation for more and more of these short studies. It is only by the unselfish labours of other scholars in producing annual or comprehensive bibliographies of these that most of us are able to keep in touch with the constantly growing literature of any subject, or even subdivisions of a subject. We have every reason to be grateful to such single-handed workers as Professor Wells with his bibliography of Middle English literature, or to those who combine to produce the yearly surveys for the Modern Humanities Research Association or the Modern Language Association of America.

It is because these major tasks—those of providing standard works

of reference for the general benefit of the world of letters—are so important for the advancement of English studies that I have thought it worth while in this address to draw attention to some which are actually in progress at the present time, to enumerate some others which ought to be undertaken and completed as soon as possible, and to suggest certain ways in which the existing societies could aid in the work by increased co-operation among their members.

The chief contribution to English studies made by most of the societies (in addition to the articles already mentioned) has been in the publication of texts or independent works, each member choosing whatever interested himself, and producing it without any co-operation from his fellow-members. By this method, it is true, much has been accomplished, but not without leaving notable gaps which may remain unfilled for years, unless some combined effort is made to supply what is still lacking.

It was really a great advance in scholastic co-operation when the Philological Society in London in 1858 accepted the suggestions of Dean Trench for "a completely new English Dictionary," and when, in order to carry out these suggestions, Herbert Coleridge and Frederick Furnivall laid the basis of collecting the material by enlisting the help of voluntary readers. It was mainly the organizing of this, and not the actual work of collecting, which came from the Society through these and some other members, but without the support and prestige of the Society it would have been more difficult, if not impossible, to arouse sufficient interest in the project. Every student of English knows how indispensable the result is for a proper understanding of the history of the language, and is aware of the method by which the material was collected; but there are probably few who realize how important a part was taken by the Philological Society in making it possible, and how continuously it maintained its interest in the undertaking. In the light of this, it seems to me unfortunate that the various dictionaries now in progress as continuations of the work founded and fostered by the Philological Society, and to a considerable extent making use of the materials collected for this, have not received greater support, both moral and material,

from the societies which might naturally have been expected to take a special interest in them. By material support I do not mean the provision of the necessary funds, as that is naturally beyond the means of any society, but adequate co-operation in the actual work of providing the new material required by the various editors.

In spite of this, the new dictionaries have now taken their place among the major tasks in English which are in a fair way towards being accomplished. Of the various suggestions which I made in my paper, "New Dictionary Schemes presented to the Philological Society, April 4, 1919," and the addition made to this in 1925, no less than four have materialized in what have aptly been termed "Period Dictionaries." Two of these are of English in its narrowest sense—viz., the dictionaries of Middle and of Early Modern English, both in progress at the University of Michigan, with Professors Moore and Fries respectively as their chief editors. Large additions have already been made to the materials obtained from Oxford and elsewhere, and each of the editors is now aiming at an early date for beginning to print. Only when these two works are completed will it be possible to obtain a full and clear idea of the language of Chaucer and Shakespeare in relation to what immediately preceded and followed it.

Parallel with these, but more limited in its range, is the Dictionary of the Older Scottish tongue, which could not have been combined with them without producing dire confusion as well as practical difficulties. This will be obvious to anyone who will examine the three parts already published, and try to imagine how their contents could be made to fit in with the English of the same period, and especially with the last two centuries of it.

Within a few weeks the first part of the Historical Dictionary of American English should be in the hands of the printer. This, like those already mentioned, has required no little co-operation in collecting to make it possible, and the body of material is even now very extensive, but much of it requires little in the way of editing, so that we may reasonably hope for a realization of the proverb that "Well begun is half done."

With these dictionaries already on the way, the only periods

of the language left unprovided for are the earliest and the latest. The latter is by far the more important of the two, since the number of those interested in Modern English is infinitely greater than that of students of Anglo-Saxon. It is true that a better, or at least a more convenient, dictionary of Anglo-Saxon could be made than the one we now have, but if any scholar of the present time combines the knowledge, the leisure, and the energy to undertake the task of superseding this, I believe that he could, for some years to come, be employed in other ways with greater profit to scholarship and to the student. The latter in particular has several crying needs, which could be supplied in a reasonable time, thereby saving him from much confusion, and his teachers from much trouble, in tracing the connection between Old and Middle English.

The dictionary of Modern English ought to be one in which the historical element would be less prominent than the presentation of all the details of the language as now used. Full attention should be given not only to definition but to the illustration of constructions and idioms, regarding which the native speaker or writer, and still more the foreigner, is frequently in doubt as to the correct usage. At present such points are frequently ignored, or inadequately treated, even in the larger dictionaries, and evidence has to be sought in the pages of the more elaborate grammars, or in special articles, or has to be collected by the inquirer from his own reading. For such a dictionary a large mass of material is already available, the arranging and supplementing of which would be a useful task for many of those interested in the study of syntax and idioms, and could in the near future enable such a work to be seriously undertaken.

This, however, brings up a question of real importance with regard to all the dictionaries. It is not difficult (although less easy now than formerly), by steady and well-directed appeals, to obtain help in collecting dictionary material. The real difficulty lies in the editing—in finding a sufficient number of properly qualified sub-editors and assistants. To assemble and maintain these as a staff in one place involves no little expense, and when funds to cover this have been obtained, it is difficult to be certain

that they will be continued as long as necessary, especially as the work may be subject to unforeseen delays. The problem would be greatly simplified if members of the various societies would come forward as volunteer sub-editors, and do all in their power to obtain assistance from their students or in other ways. This system, devised by Dr. Furnivall, proved of great value for the progress of the New English Dictionary, and ought to be possible for those now in progress, although more specialized knowledge would be required for some of these. The sacrifice of time might be considerable, as it was for many of those who thus aided in the past, but in return there would not only be the general gain but individual profit in the increase of knowledge which comes from work of this kind.

Everyone closely concerned with the study of Middle English knows that one of the most urgently needed auxiliaries to that study is a dictionary of Anglo-French. This is a task which ought not only to have been undertaken, but ought to have been completed, long before this. It would be an extensive one, it is true, for Anglo-French literature and documentary records are of no small bulk, as may be seen from Professor Vising's bibliography, but not more impossible of achievement than those which have already been undertaken or accomplished. Failing a complete dictionary, even a full vocabulary of the Anglo-French words taken over into Middle English would be of the greatest value. Professor Skeat in his *Notes on English Etymology*, which was published in 1901, provided a partial list from a few sources, and this has been of much service by giving dated examples of a considerable number of words and forms. It would really require only a year or two of work by several hands to compile a sufficiently complete vocabulary of this kind. It could even be done in time for the results to be available for the Middle English dictionary throughout the greater portion of the alphabet. For lack of it, the precise French form which is represented by the Middle English word is frequently difficult or impossible to find, and the close connection between the two languages is to that extent obscured.

For Middle English, and for the modern dialects of Northern

England, another great desideratum is a complete and authoritative survey of the Scandinavian elements in the language, in place of the partial studies at present available. The main part of this should also consist of a dictionary, giving the historical evidence for all the words of Scandinavian origin from their earliest appearance in English, with sufficient illustration to make clear the record of each in respect of date, currency, local range, and use. It would then be possible to make a better estimate of the nature and value of this element than has yet been done—to distinguish, for instance, between those words which have disappeared and those which have survived, between those which are recorded early and those which first appear at a late date, between those which either are or were in common use and those which are rare at any time, and between those which have passed into standard use and those which have remained purely dialectal. These distinctions would not only raise, but to a great extent would help to make clear, a number of questions regarding the interaction of related languages, and the reasons why some words are freely accepted, others barely admitted, while still others are tried and finally rejected. The task of doing all this is not a slight or easy one. It can be successfully accomplished only by one who has a thorough knowledge of both the old and the modern Scandinavian tongues, and can accurately reconstruct the form which any word belonging to these would have in the ninth and tenth centuries.

For the study of this element in Middle English the alliterative poetry of the fourteenth century is of primary value, and its significance in this connection has not yet been fully appreciated. The whole vocabulary, however, of these poems also calls for a separate and exhaustive examination. Much that has been written on the relationship of the various pieces to each other has been based on too restricted a comparison. To attain really sound results we ought to have a concordance of all the alliterative and other significant words in the whole of this body of poetry. The Middle English dictionary obviously cannot furnish full materials for such a study ; it must be a separate work, and is no insuperable task, as it is mainly a mechanical one, and could

be accomplished in a short time if distributed among a number of students under proper supervision. There have been a few concordances made in recent years which are of less importance for the history of English and of English poetry than one to the alliterative poems would be.

I have spoken first of the dictionaries, and other works of a linguistic nature, merely because my own immediate interests lie in that field and because some of these works are already in progress. By giving them precedence I do not mean to suggest that I consider them of greater importance than certain tasks in the field of literature which cannot readily be accomplished without more co-operation than has hitherto been usual. The greatest of these—perhaps too ambitious to be easily realized—is a comprehensive work to which everyone would naturally turn for the essential facts relating to all important English books and their authors. Such a work was actually planned by the late Sir Walter Raleigh, and some preparations were made for realizing it, which unfortunately were abandoned because of the difficulties of the time. His idea was to have a work with the general title of *Records of English Literature*, which would consist of four series of volumes. The first series was to contain the *Annals of English Literature*, from at least the introduction of printing into England. In these Annals would be exhibited, year by year, the books printed or written at that precise date, arranged in groups according to their relative importance. By this arrangement it would be made possible, not only to trace the annual progress of English literature, but to see at a glance, or with a little attention, what books were appearing contemporaneously—a fact of great importance in many respects.

The second series was intended to contain select bibliographies of all the important authors; the third, short lives of these authors, limited to the known and relevant facts, and supported wherever possible by citation of the author's own statements or contemporary evidence. In the fourth series, which was not an essential part of the scheme, Sir Walter proposed to collect all the best essays on, or reviews of, the more important authors or their works. Each of the three main series was to be copiously illus-

trated by facsimiles of title-pages and of the authors' manuscripts, possibly also by portraits or other illustrations.

This was clearly a magnificent idea, which ought neither to be lost sight of nor dismissed as too vast to be accomplished. It is obviously one which, if ever undertaken, would make progress in proportion to the number of those prepared to take a share in the work. The preparations that were actually made towards it have not been in vain, although they are not at present serving the purpose for which they were intended.

Various societies, more especially the Camden and the Early English Text, have in the long course of their existence rendered great services to English studies by the number of texts which they have not only printed but published in such a manner as to make them readily available. In recent years, however, there has been a falling-off in the interest and importance of such texts as have been published, a number of them being of very slight literary or linguistic value. On the other hand, important texts are still unprinted, and are likely to remain so for some time, unless a concerted effort is made by those who have an interest in them. There are also a number of which new editions are required, either because the earlier editions are difficult to procure or because they are not up to the level of modern scholarship. The need for some of these has long been recognized, and it has now become evident that they can most readily be supplied by a group of scholars, each undertaking the editing of a single manuscript, as in the case of the long overdue *Ancren Riwle*. To leave a text of this nature to one editor is to postpone its appearance indefinitely, as experience has shown. The difficulty in such cases is that so few scholars have the necessary combination of leisure, interest, and knowledge to collate all the manuscripts, work out their relationship to each other, examine and decide upon the various problems relating to the text, and so produce a definitive or even adequate edition. If the various forms of the text have already been made accessible by a division of labour, the world can better afford to wait for someone to undertake the task, thus rendered all the easier, of uniting these separate parts into an ordered whole.

To make it clear that much yet remains to be done, a few instances from the Middle English period may be given. Some years ago the problems connected with the Wycliffite bible were discussed at length by the Abbé Gasquet and subsequently by Miss Deanesly, but it is still a notable lack in this most interesting field of literary and religious history that the earliest copies of both the first and second versions remain unprinted. The original manuscript of the portion translated by Nicholas of Hereford (Bodl. 959), and the immediate copy of this (Douce 369), must obviously form the basis for any proper study of the text, and on this account, as well as for their dialectal features, ought to be printed in full. It would then be more possible than it is at present to deal with the questions connected with the completion of the first version and the authorship and date of the second, together with the relationship between these two, and of both to the intermediate version represented by two of the many manuscripts. A good many years ago Professor Skeat wrote on the dialect of the Wycliffite bible. Strictly speaking, however, this was only a study of the dialect in the manuscripts printed by Forshall and Madden ; the actual relationship of the numerous copies to each other in this respect has not yet been studied, although it presents some most interesting features.

Two other notable works of the same period are in an equally unsatisfactory condition in this respect. The only printed text of Trevisa's translation of Migden does not represent his own dialect, and there is no modern edition of his version of Bartholomæus' *De proprietatibus rerum*. To edit either of these would be no light task, but for our knowledge of the south-western dialect towards the close of the fourteenth century they are of primary importance. In the case of the Bartholomæus, the successive changes in the old editions are in themselves valuable indications of the substitution of new words for old in the early period of modern English.

Of the various types of Middle English literature there is none that can compare in extent and in general interest with the metrical romances. Of the total number of these there are not a few of which no good edition exists. If printed at all, they were edited

a century or more ago, and frequently from a single manuscript. A good example of this is the early *Alisaunder*, for the understanding of which in many passages it is absolutely necessary to have the readings of both the manuscripts. Others again may have been printed in recent times, but only in editions not readily available. Now, among the publications of the Early English Text Society the romances form so considerable a number that they form the natural nucleus of a complete corpus, which could be rounded off in a few years by a small body of diligent editors. It would be a greater service to scholarship, and to the study of English literature, to accomplish this task than to bring out, now and then, unconnected editions of romances which are already available in a satisfactory form, and for which there is not even the excuse that they are wanted for class use.

In the same way, the Early English Text Society's reprints of a number of Caxton's works could serve as a basis for a complete set of these. As things are, to collect all such Caxton reprints as have already been issued is no easy nor inexpensive task.

Such are some of the incomplete, or altogether untouched, major tasks in the older periods of English. It would be easy to continue the enumeration into the language and literature of the later centuries, but I leave that to those whose special studies make them more competent than I am to judge the relative importance of the various suggestions which might be made. It will be more profitable, in my opinion, rather to consider some general aspects of the situation, and suggest means by which some of the defects might be supplied within a reasonable number of years. None of us, I imagine, are at heart very enthusiastic about schemes which can only benefit those who are to come after us, however prone we may be to overlook the fact that this is the probable fate of projects that are too ambitious.

If the advance in any line of English or other studies, such as the members of the Association are interested in, is to be continuous and systematic, there must be greater combination in planning and greater co-operation in working than there is at present. The Modern Humanities Research Association has a large number of members interested in definite subjects, and many of these again

are members of other societies with similar aims, such as the Modern Language Association of America. It should be possible for some at least of those who have a common interest, and who feel the lack of the aids to learning that I have indicated, to come together to consider the various tasks which ought to be undertaken first—there will naturally be differences of opinion as to the relative importance of these—and then endeavour to accomplish them, simultaneously or in succession, by combined action on the part of all who are able and willing to do their share. This might involve the sacrifice of individual preferences for a few years, but in the end there would be a clear gain, not only by the rounding off of those things which will otherwise remain incomplete, but by the resulting limitation of separate articles and of the time spent in keeping a record of these.

There is another reason why such co-operation is desirable. At the beginning of an extensive piece of research it may be possible for some time to carry on the work without other expenditure than that of time and labour. Sooner or later, however, satisfactory progress can only be made by the employment of regular assistance, and this normally involves the ability to pay for such help. Funds for such purposes are not easy to obtain under the most favourable conditions, but there is all the more difficulty in doing so if the project for which they are asked is an individual one, unsupported even by those who would be glad to see it accomplished. There would undoubtedly be a better chance for an undertaking which was not only sponsored by a society with a large and distinguished membership, but in the completion of which a certain number of these members were directly involved. This would not only furnish more convincing evidence that the work was worth doing, but would afford greater security that it would ultimately be completed.

I am well aware that these proposals, whether they apply to linguistic or literary studies, have their limitations, and are not valid for all the spheres of research in which members of the Association are interested. There are results which can only be attained by the individual, whether he reaches them by long and comprehensive study or by some brilliant intuition. In every

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subject, however, there is some need for the collecting and arranging of essential facts or materials, without an exact knowledge of which some fresh theory or new interpretation may prove to be only a false light. It is because the assembling of these facts and materials is both a safeguard against error, and a means of rising above them and viewing the whole subject from a higher plane, that I have used the theme of the major tasks in English studies to illustrate the need and the advantages of closer co-ordination in the work of scholars. Whether I am right in believing that this Association could materially assist in furthering this I must leave to the members to decide.

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Walmsley, Fr., Athenæum Antonianum, Via Merulana 124,
Rome 24, Italy.

BOOKS RECEIVED

The receipt of the following publications is acknowledged with thanks :

Studies in English Literature, vol. xiii., no. 4, October, 1933.
English Literary Society of Japan, Tokyo Imperial University.

A Tentative Bibliography of the Belles-Lettres of the Argentine Republic. By Alfred Coester. Harvard and Oxford University Presses, 1933.

A Tentative Bibliography of Columbian Literature. By S. E. Leavitt and C. García-Prada. Harvard and Oxford University Presses, 1934.

Bibliografía de la Poesía Mexicana. By A. Torres-Ríoseco and R. E. Warner. Harvard and Oxford University Presses, 1934.

A Tentative Bibliography of the Belles-Lettres of Ecuador. By G. Rivera. Harvard and Oxford University Presses, 1934.

Burns Chronicle and Club Directory, 2nd series, vol. ix. Burns Federation, Kilmarnock, 1934.

Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature. By Members of the English Department, University of Michigan. University of Michigan Press : Ann Arbor, 1933.

The Relationship of the Spanish Libro de Alexandre to the Alexandreis of Gautier de Chatillon. By R. S. Willis, Jr. Elliott Monographs, no. 31. Princeton and Oxford University Presses, 1934.

The Modern Muse : Poems of Today, British and American. Oxford University Press (for English Association), 1934.

A Catalogue of the English Books and Fragments from 1477 to 1535 in the Public Library of Victoria. By A. B. Foxcroft. Melbourne : Fraser and Jenkinson, 1933.

Edgar Allan Poe in Hispanic Literature. By J. E. Englekirk. Instituto de las Españas, New York, 1934.

Hispania, First Special Number. Stanford University, California, 1934.

P.M.L.A., vol. xl ix., nos. 1 and 2, 1934.

Studies in Spenser's Complaints. By Harold Stein. New York : Oxford University Press, 1934.



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